DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 486 JC 810 029

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TITLE Putting Learning to Work: A Profile of Students in North Carolina Community Colleges, Technical Institutes, and Technical Colleges. A Summary of Research Findings.
INSTITUTION North Carolina State Univ., Raleigh. Dept. of Adult and Community Coll. Education.
SPONS AGENCY North Carolina State Dept. of Community Colleges, Raleigh. Occupational Education Research Services.
PUB DATE Aug 80
NOTE 26p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Students; College Choice; Continuing Education; Information Sources; Occupational Aspiration; State Surveys; *Student Characteristics; Student Educational Objectives; *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *North Carolina

ABSTRACT

Selected findings are presented from a Spring 1979 survey of 16,408 students enrolled in 57 North Carolina community/technical colleges and technical institutes. The study report is organized to answer seven research questions. (1) Who are the students being served by the North Carolina community college system? This section provides profiles of several student subgroups in terms of their age, sex, race, marital status, employment status, income, enrollment patterns, and educational background. Curriculum students, and within this category, college transfer, general education, special credit, technical, and vocational students, are profiled, as are continuing education students, that is, occupational and academic extension, and fundamental education students. (2) What are the major differences between curriculum and continuing education students? (3) To what extent are these students representative of the North Carolina adult population? (4) How are these student profiles changing? (5) What factors are related to students' choice of institution? This section considers the influence of institutional characteristics, students' educational interests, distance to classes, financial aid, and other student services. (6) How did students learn of institutional offerings and who influenced their attendance decisions? (7) What are students' employment and educational plans? (AYC)

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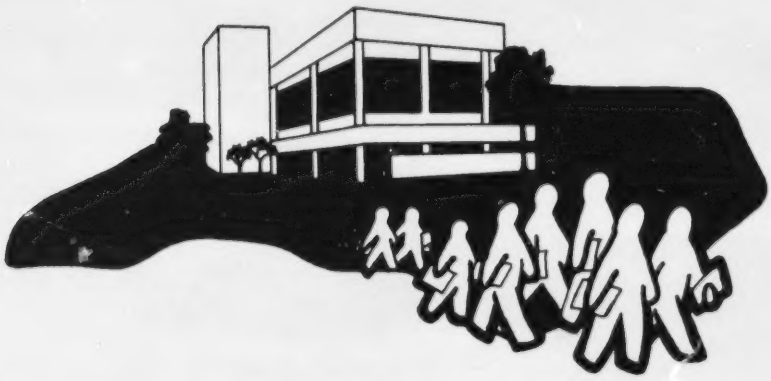
PUTTING LEARNING TO WORK

A PROFILE OF STUDENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES, TECHNICAL INSTITUTES, AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS



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PUTTING LEARNING TO WORK

A Profile of Students in North Carolina Community Colleges, Technical Institutes, and Technical Colleges

Ronald W. Shearon
Robert G. Templin, Jr.
David E. Daniel
Lee McGraw Hoffman
Russell F. West*

A Summary of Research Findings

This project was conducted by the Department of Adult and Community College Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina 27650, and sponsored by Occupational Education Research Services, Division of Planning and Research, North Carolina Department of Community Colleges, Raleigh, North Carolina 27611.

August, 1980

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Acknowledgements

Numerous persons have contributed in various ways to the development, activation, completion, and reporting of this project, and the authors wish to express their gratitude to each and every one. However, special acknowledgement is extended to the following:

- Larry J. Blake, State President, Department of Community Colleges, and the State Board of Education for the financial support provided for the study.
- Fred W. Manley, Coordinator, Occupational Education Research Services, and Project Officer, for his support and encouragement.
- All of the presidents, faculty, and students of the 57 participating institutions for their cooperation, time, and effort in making this study possible.
- The institutional coordinators whose outstanding efforts made the data-collection process run so smoothly.
- Edgar J. Boone, Head, Department of Adult and Community College Education, North Carolina State University, for his administrative support.
- Carl J. Dolce, Dean, School of Education, North Carolina State University, for his assistance and encouragement.
- Suzanne Gordon, W. L. Gragg, R. D. Mustian, and C. H. Proctor of North Carolina State University for technical and methodological assistance.
- Michael McAnulty and Frances Pendergrass of the NTS Research Corporation for their assistance in designing and scoring the survey instrument.
- Penni McCall, who designed the logo used on the cover of the report.
- Adele Porter Covington for editorial assistance.
- Glenda Jacobs and Marjorie Edwards for typing manuscripts and performing numerous other tasks that facilitated the completion of this project.
- Sherry Madison, a research assistant during the early phases of the project, for her contributions to the research design, survey procedures, and data collection process.
- Clifton Middleton for his contributions during the final phases of the project.

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Putting Learning to Work

Highlights*

An emerging theme in this study of North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) students focuses on "putting learning to work." All of the students are adults and most of them have family and job responsibilities. Most are employed and enroll in courses as part-time learners to enhance their job skills and employment opportunities. A new pattern of integrating working and learning appears to be evolving for these adults who are "putting learning to work."

Age: The NCCCS serves an increasingly older student population; the median ages are 25 and 38, respectively, for curriculum and continuing education students.

Sex: The NCCCS provides educational opportunities for an increasing proportion of females; 54% of the curriculum students and 71% of the continuing education students are females.

Race: The NCCCS enrolls a representative proportion of students from all racial groups; enrollment distributions in curriculum and continuing education programs match the racial distributions in the North Carolina adult population.

Educational level: The NCCCS serves an increasingly better educated clientele; enrollment changes over the past decade show a declining percentage of students with less than a high school education and an increasing percentage who have some four-year college experience; nearly 12% of all students hold a baccalaureate degree.

Employment status: The NCCCS provides educational opportunities for adults who are working and attending classes on a part-time basis; over one-half of the curriculum and the continuing education students work either full time or part time.

Day/evening attendance: About one-half of all students attend classes during the day; 60% of curriculum students attend classes during the day and 61% of continuing education students attend classes in the evening.

Work/learning orientation: The NCCCS serves a working/learning-oriented student population; 72% of the curriculum students are enrolled in either technical or vocational programs and over 50% of the continuing education students are enrolled in occupational extension courses.

Institutional characteristics: The characteristics of NCCCS institutions that attract students are the programs available, location, and low cost.

* Findings are based on a 1979 survey of a sample of 16,408 students enrolled in 57 North Carolina community/technical colleges and technical institutes.

Introduction

A continuing challenge facing the administrators, policymakers, and faculty of North Carolina's public two-year postsecondary educational institutions is to maintain a current knowledge base on their students and to keep abreast of changes in student characteristics over time. Because operating and planning decisions should reflect the needs of the students enrolled, being enrolled, as well as potential enrollees, the purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth knowledge base on the characteristics of currently enrolled students through their answers to the following questions:

- Who are the students being served by the institutions of the North Carolina Community College System?
- What are the major differences between curriculum and continuing education students?
- To what extent are these students representative of North Carolina's adult population?
- How are student profiles changing?
- What factors are related to these students' decisions to attend North Carolina community/technical colleges and technical institutes?
- How did these students learn of institutional offerings and who influenced their decisions to attend?
- What are students' plans for future employment and continuing education?

These are but a few of the more than 15 questions answered from a statewide survey of a scientifically drawn sample of more than 16,400 curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the 57 community/technical colleges and technical institutes in North Carolina. Data were collected in the spring of 1979 from students who responded to a 48-item machine scoreable survey instrument. Some of the major findings are reported in this summary.[1]

[1] The findings reported herein were excerpted from the technical report, *Putting Learning to Work: A Profile of Students in North Carolina Community Colleges, Technical Institutes, and Technical Colleges*, by Ronald W. Shearon, Robert G. Templin, Jr., David E. Daniel, Lee McGraw Hoffman, and Russell F. West (November, 1980).

Who Are the Students?

Students attending North Carolina's community/technical colleges and technical institutes may be as diverse as the community itself. In recognition of the tremendous differential in their demographic, socioeconomic, academic, and attendance characteristics, no single "typical" student profile is presented herein. However, the nature and organizational patterns of most of the 57 institutions indicated that there might be some utility in developing and presenting profiles of curriculum students and continuing education students. In addition to the typical curriculum student profile, subprofiles are presented for the following programs: college-transfer, general education, special credit, technical, and vocational. Likewise, the typical continuing education student profile is accompanied by subprofiles in the programs of academic extension, occupational extension, and fundamental education. While these student profiles represent a statistical averaging of student characteristics, they may not reflect the true diversity in the students, but they may offer useful generalizations.

The Curriculum Student Profile

The typical curriculum student is a 25-year-old, white, married or single female who is head of her household. She works full time or part time in a white-collar occupation at which she earns less than $4.00 per hour. If married, her 1978 family income was about $12,000.

This student enrolls in one or two courses per quarter and attends classes on the main campus during the day. She is a B-average high school graduate and most likely is enrolled in a technical program.

The College-Transfer Student

The typical college-transfer student is a 22-year-old, single or engaged white female who lives with her parents in the county in which her institution is located. She earned less than $5,000 in 1978, but her parents' 1978 income was between $15,000 and $20,000.

This student may have some postsecondary experience in a four-year college and is almost certainly a B-average high school graduate. She is likely to be employed either full time or part time, to attend classes on the main campus during the day, and to enroll in four or more courses per quarter.

The General Education Student

The typical general education student is a married, 29-year-old white female who lives with her spouse in the county in which her institution is located. This student works full time and her family income for 1978 was over $12,000.

This student most likely has some four-year college experience and almost certainly is a B-average high school graduate. She is equally likely to attend classes in the day or evening, and the one to three courses in which she is enrolled are almost always held on the institution's main campus.

The Special Credit Student

The typical special credit student is a 31-year-old married, white female who lives with her spouse in the same county in which her institution is located. She probably works full time and the family income was over $20,000 in 1978.

Chances are good that she is a college graduate who maintained a B average in high school. She attends her one special credit class in the evening on the institution's main campus.

The Technical Student

The typical technical student is a 24-year-old, single, engaged, or married female. If single, she lives with her parents; if married, she lives with her spouse. In either case, she resides in the same county in which her institution is located. She probably works full time to supplement her spouse's or parents' income, and her primary income was between $10,000 and $12,000 in 1978.

She is at least a B-average high school graduate and may have some four-year college experience. She enrolls in two to four courses per quarter and attends classes on the main campus during the day.

The Vocational Student

The typical vocational student is a 25-year-old, married, white male, and probably not a military veteran. He lives with his spouse, works full time, and his 1978 family income probably was between $9,000 and $11,000. His head-of-household most likely works in a crafts occupation.

Although probably a B-average high school graduate, his chances of having less than a high school education are greater than those of students in other curriculum programs. He typically attends class for approximately 20 hours per week on the main campus during the day.

The Continuing Education Student Profile

The typical continuing education student most likely is a 38-year-old, married, white female who lives with her spouse. Her 1978 family income was between $10,000 and $12,000. She is a high school graduate whose parents have less than an eighth-grade education.

The continuing education student is very likely to be enrolled in an occupational extension program, attending one class a week in the evening at an off-campus site. She most likely is employed full time, and travels five or fewer miles to class one way, a trip she makes once a week.

The Occupational Extension Student

The typical occupational extension student most likely is a 38-year-old white female who is married and lives with her spouse in the county in which her institution is located. She works full time and her 1978 family income was between $10,000 and $12,000.

She probably graduated from high school with a B average and may have some four-year college experience. She is enrolled in one course which meets once a week in the evening at some off-campus site.

The Academic Extension Student

The typical academic extension student is a 44-year-old, married, white female who lives with her spouse in the same county in which her institution is located. She probably is a homemaker or a retiree, but may be working full time. Together, she and her spouse earned between $12,000 and $15,000 in 1978.

This typical academic extension student probably completed at least high school where she maintained a B average. She is enrolled in one course that meets once a week in the evening at some off-campus center.

The Fundamental Education Student

The typical fundamental education student is a 28-year-old, single or engaged, black female who lives with her parents. She works full time and had a primary income of under $6,000 in 1978.

This student has less than a high school education and may not have finished the ninth grade. If she did attend high school, she maintained a C average. She is enrolled in one or two courses which she attends in the evening at some off-campus site.

What Are the Major Differences Between Curriculum and Continuing Education Students?

While there are similarities between curriculum and continuing education students, there are also noticeable differences in several characteristics. Some of these differences are summarized here.

- Fifty-four percent of the curriculum students are females as compared to 71% of the continuing education students (Figure 1).
- Curriculum students tend to be younger than continuing education students. The median age of curriculum students is about 25 years as compared to 38 years for continuing education students (Figure 2).
- Curriculum students tend to have a higher level of education than continuing education students.
- Continuing education students are more likely to enroll on a part-time basis than are curriculum students.

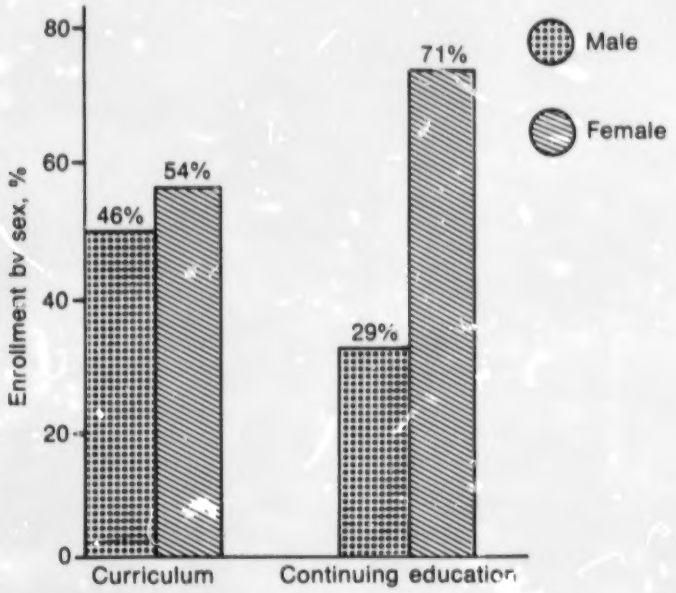

Figure 1. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by sex

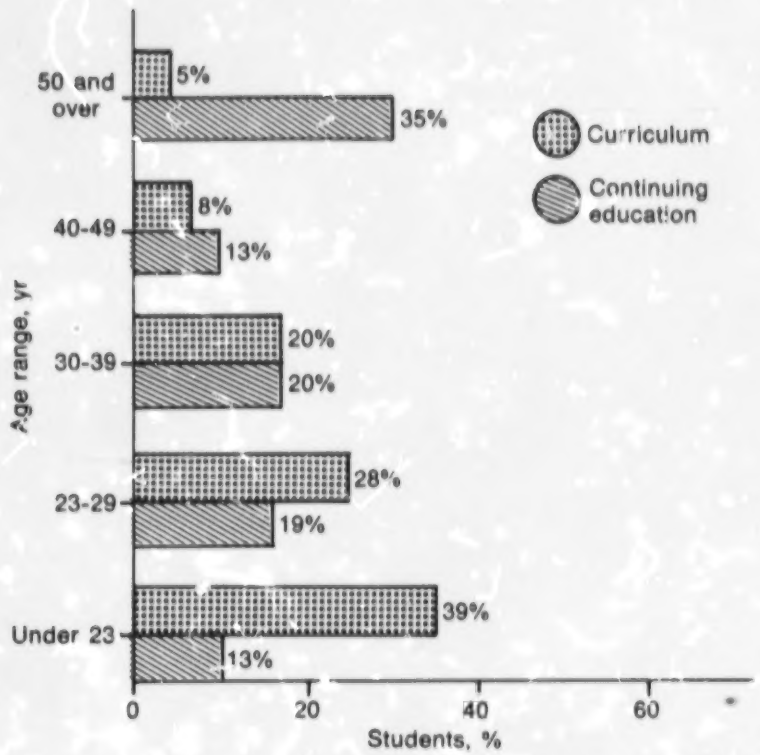

Figure 2. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System, 1973, by age

- Curriculum students are more likely to be employed than are continuing education students. A much larger proportion of continuing education than curriculum students are either homemakers or retired (Figure 3).
- Curriculum students are more likely than continuing education students to attend classes during the day (Figure 4).

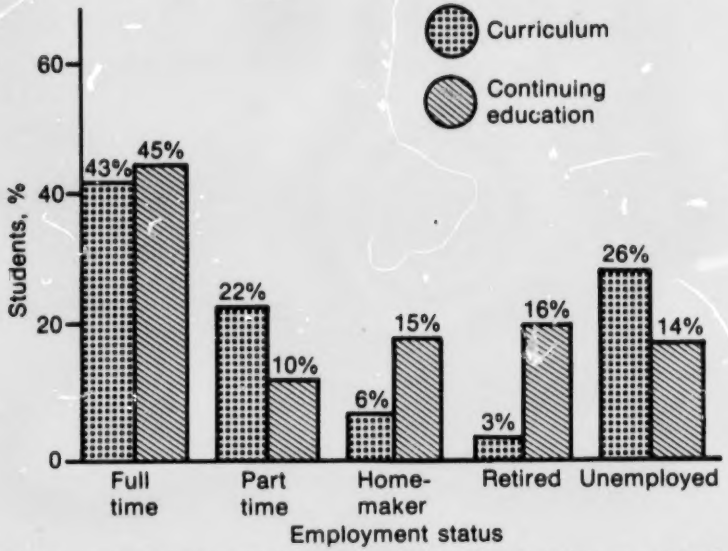

Figure 3. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by employment status

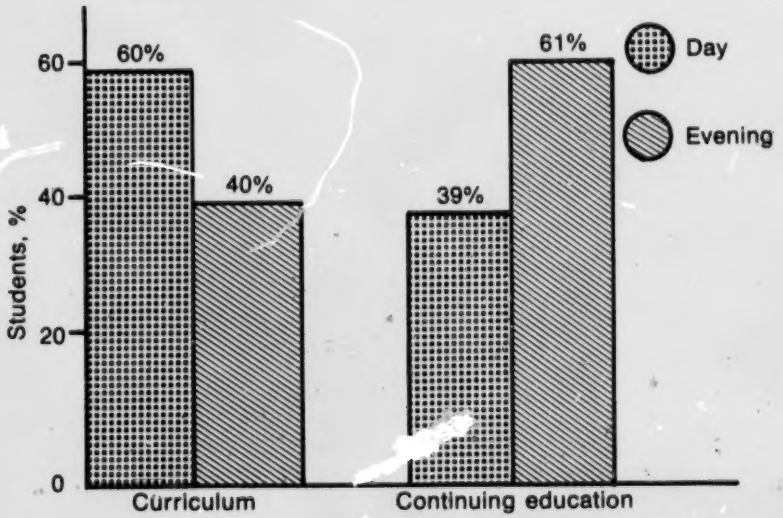

Figure 4. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by time of attendance

Are the Students Representative of the Adult Population of North Carolina?

One of the major tenets of the comprehensive North Carolina Community College System institution is that its programs should serve all segments of the community. Based on the findings of this study, the following were evident:

- Enrollments in curriculum programs of community/technical colleges and technical institutes tend to represent a proportional cross section of the adult male and female population of North Carolina.[1] In continuing education programs, a higher proportion of females are enrolled than exist in the State's adult population (Figure 5).

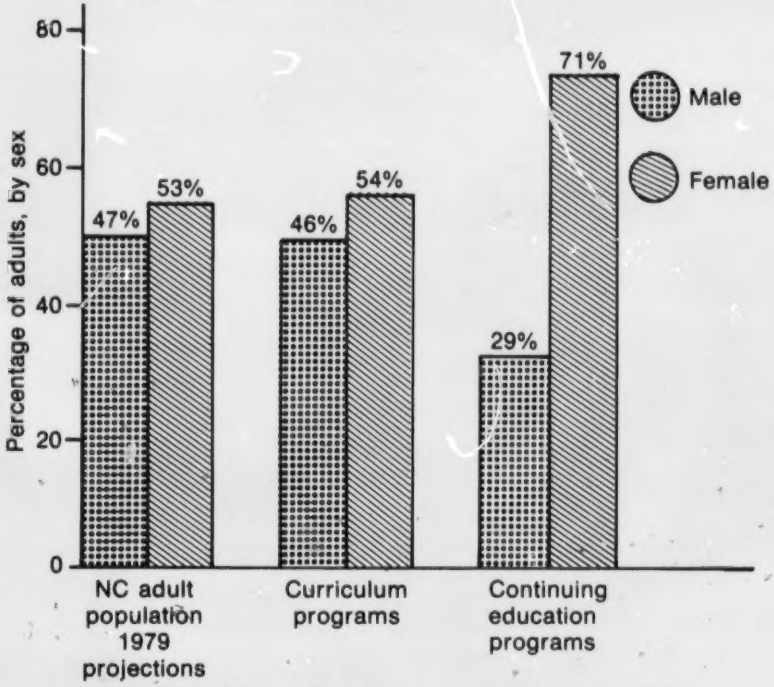

Figure 5. Distribution of adults in North Carolina's population, 1979, as compared to student enrollments in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by sex

[1] Projections for the 1979 North Carolina adult population were made by R. David Mustian, Professor of Sociology, North Carolina State University at Raleigh.

- In terms of race, North Carolina Community College System institutions' enrollments represent a cross section of whites and blacks in both curriculum and continuing education programs (Figure 6).

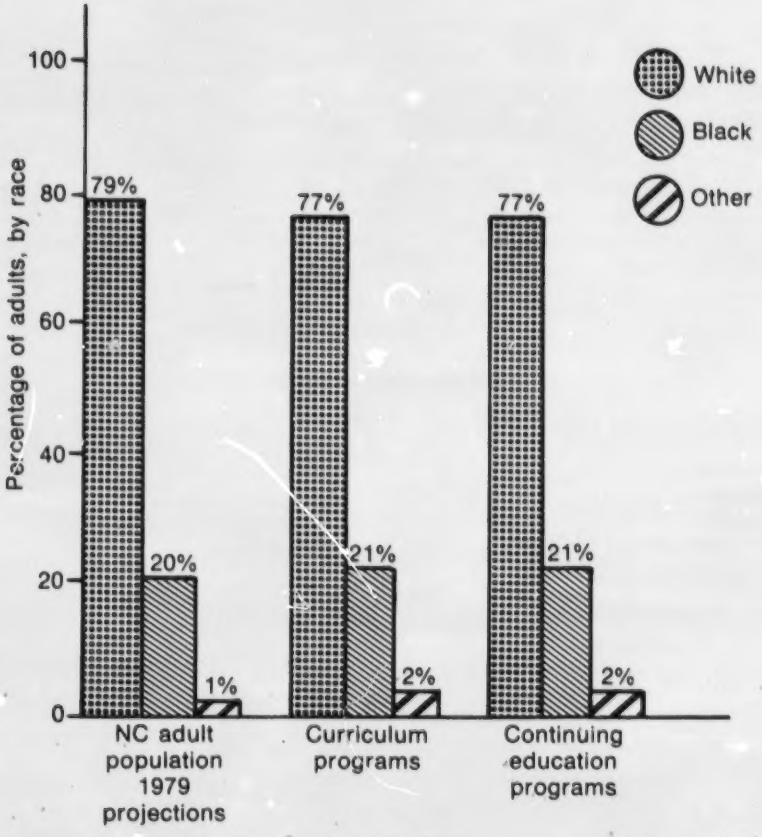

Figure 6. Distribution of adults in North Carolina's population, 1979, as compared to student enrollments in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by race

- Students in curriculum programs are not representative of the adult population in terms of age—older adults are underrepresented in these programs. Continuing education program enrollments are representative of all major age groupings in the State's adult population.

- Adults with less than a high school education are underrepresented in the total student population.
- North Carolina Community College System institutions tend to enroll a higher proportion of low-income adults than are represented in the State's population.

How Have Curriculum and Continuing Education Student Profiles Changed Over the Past Decade?

To determine changes in curriculum and continuing education student profiles that have occurred since 1968, data from the 1979 study were compared to similar data collected in 1968, 1969, and 1974.

Curriculum Student Profile Changes

- The enrollment trend appeared to be toward a larger proportion of minority and older adult students.
- The proportion of female enrollment over the decade has increased almost 10 percent, and the proportion of male enrollment has declined correspondingly (Figure 7).

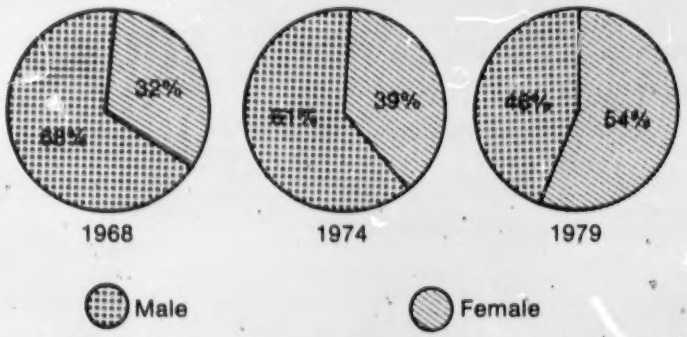

Figure 7. Distribution of curriculum students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1968, 1974, and 1979, by sex

- The decade has seen an increase and then a decrease in the proportion of students who plan to pursue the baccalaureate degree and the proportion who plan to be employed in North Carolina.
- The enrollment trend among curriculum students has been toward an increasing proportion in the technical programs and a corresponding decrease in college-transfer and general education programs (Figure 8).
- The enrollment trends in terms of the sex, race, age, and educational levels of students are becoming more representative of the North Carolina adult population.

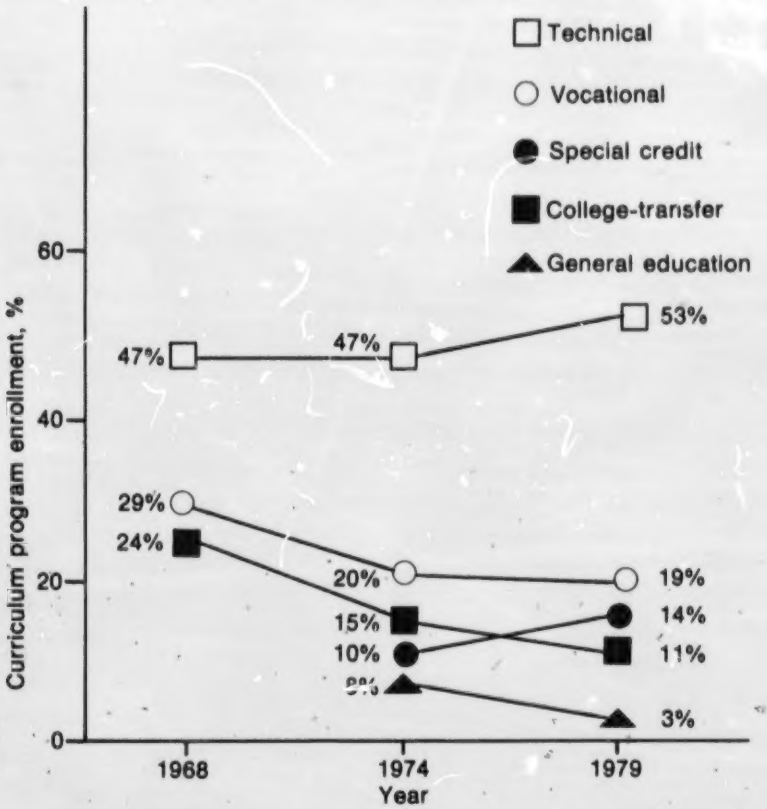

Figure 8. Distribution of curriculum students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1968, 1974, and 1979, by program

- Curriculum students are typically attending more classes in the evening (Figure 9) and enrolling on a part-time basis.
- The proportion of students who are either separated, divorced, or widowed has increased as has the proportion of students who maintain "nontraditional" types of residence patterns.
- Enrollments show a trend toward a declining percentage of students with less than a high school education and an increasing percentage of students with prior college experience (Figure 10).

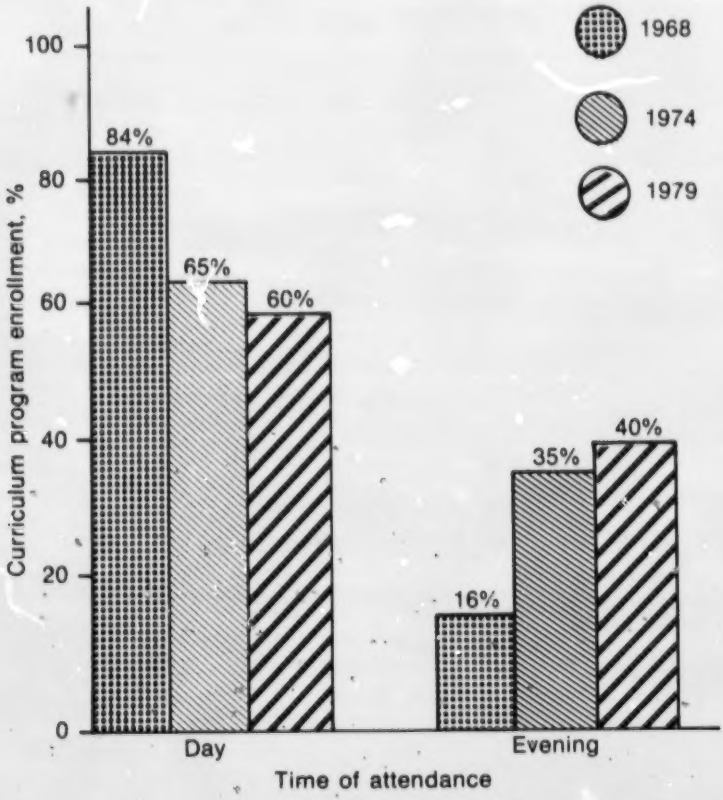

Figure 9. Distribution of curriculum students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1968, 1974, and 1979, by time of attendance

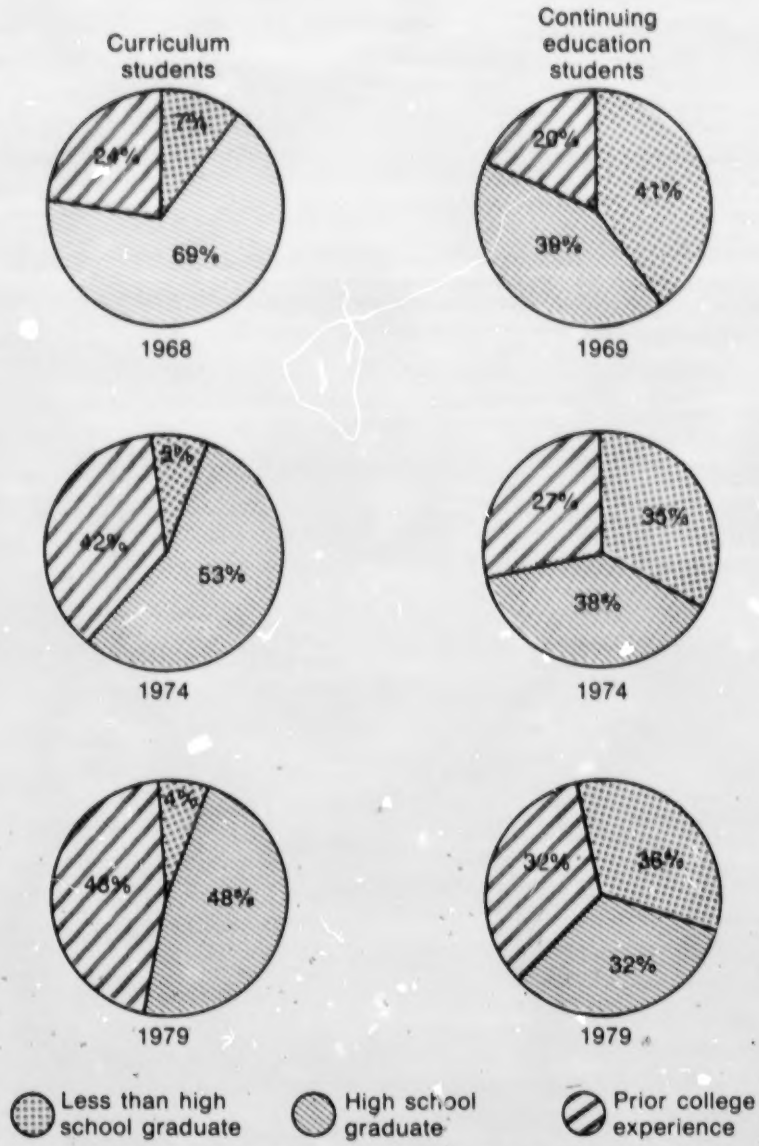

Figure 10. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1968, 1969, 1974, and 1979, by educational level

Continuing Education Student Profile Changes

- Over the 10-year period, the enrollment trend in continuing education has been toward a larger proportion of females and older adults.
- The proportion of married continuing education students has decreased while the proportion of separated, divorced, or widowed students has increased.
- Enrollees in continuing education have tended to be better educated (Figure 10).
- The proportion of continuing education students who are not working, including retirees, has increased over the past decade.
- The proportion of continuing education students who attend classes during the day has increased (Figure 11).

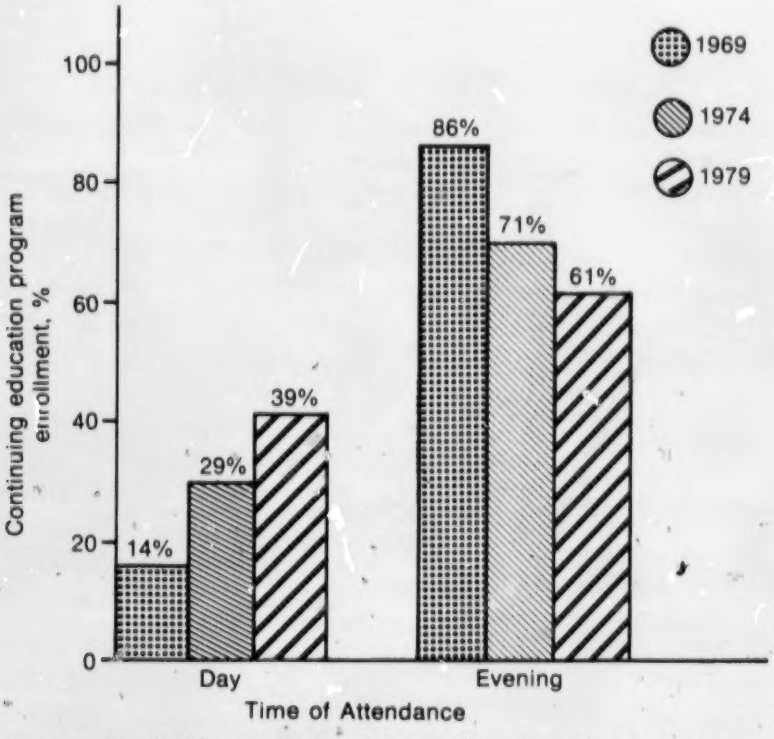

Figure 11: Distribution of continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1969, 1974, and 1979, by time of attendance

- The proportion of nonwhite continuing education students has increased and then decreased over the 10-year period under study (Figure 12).
- These students are increasingly residing in the county in which their institution is located and a larger proportion are continuing students, i.e., those who enroll for more than one quarter.
- Enrollments in terms of these students' race and age are becoming increasingly representative of the North Carolina adult population.

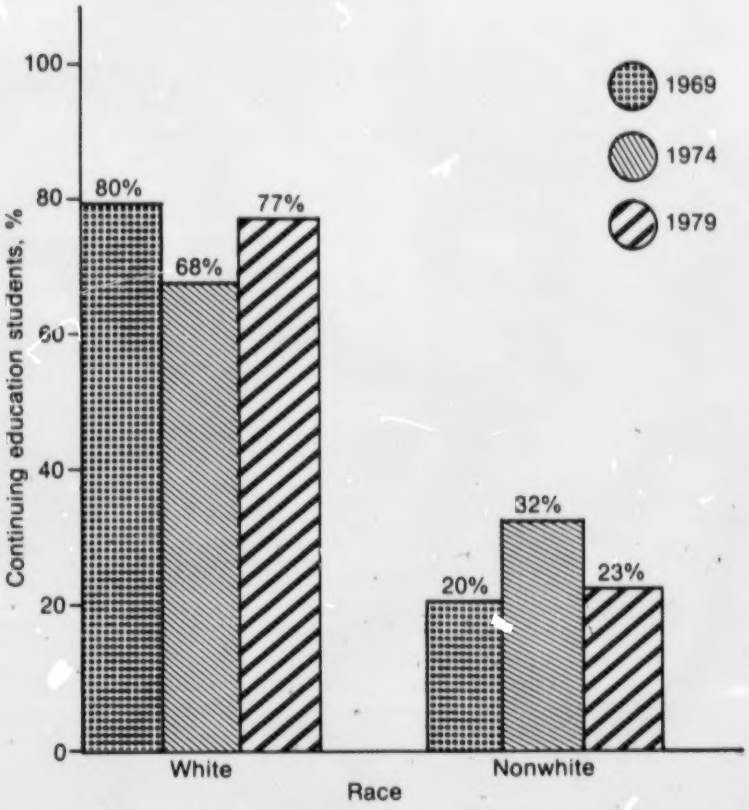

Figure 12. Distribution of continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System during the years 1969, 1974, and 1979, by race

What Factors Are Related to Students' Decisions to Attend North Carolina Community/Technical Colleges and Technical Institutes?

Student decisions to attend a public, two-year, postsecondary educational institution are based upon many factors. In this study, efforts were made to determine how selected factors were related to students' decisions to attend these institutions.

The Importance of Community/Technical Colleges and Technical Institutes

The important role played by community/technical colleges and technical institutes in providing educational opportunities for North Carolina's adult population becomes especially clear in light of the following findings:

- Nearly 8 out of 10 curriculum students indicated that the community/technical college or technical institute in which they enrolled was their first choice over all other forms of postsecondary education.
- Ninety-five percent of the continuing education students selected their community/technical college or technical institute as their number one choice for continuing their education.
- Sixty-one percent of the curriculum students indicated that, had the institution in which they were enrolled not existed, they would have attended another institution in order to further their education.
- Nearly 8 out of 10 continuing education students indicated that they would not have sought educational opportunities elsewhere.

Influence of Institutional Characteristics

When students were asked what characteristics of their institution most influenced their decisions to attend, a variety of responses were obtained. However, the following, in descending order of influence, were perceived by curriculum and continuing education students as the most important:

- The programs available at the institution.
- The location of the institution.

- The low cost.
- The quality of instruction.

Reasons for Continuing Education

When students were asked their reasons for deciding to continue their education, major differences were observed between curriculum and continuing education students:

- Curriculum students gave reasons that suggested a principally economic motive: first, "to earn more money" and, second, "to get a better job."
- Continuing education students, while citing "to earn more money" as their second choice, overwhelmingly indicated "to learn things of interest" as their most important reason for continuing their education.

Distance to Classes

Most students travel short distances to attend classes. The most important findings regarding distance traveled one way were:

- Sixty percent of the curriculum students traveled 10 or fewer miles to class.
- Less than 9% of the curriculum and 3% of the continuing education students traveled farther than 25 miles to attend class (Figure 13).
- Nearly 6 out of 10 continuing education students traveled fewer than 6 miles to attend class and 90% traveled fewer than 16 miles.

Financial Aid

The availability of student financial aid influences a student's ability to attend a community/technical college or technical institute. The findings of this study indicated that:

- Approximately 40% of the curriculum students were receiving some form of financial assistance.
- Among curriculum program enrollees, the largest proportions receiving financial aid were in vocational (53%) and technical programs (50%); the smallest proportions were in college-transfer (35%) and special credit (7%) programs.
- The bulk of the financial aid for curriculum students was from Veterans Administration benefits (36%) and Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (31%).

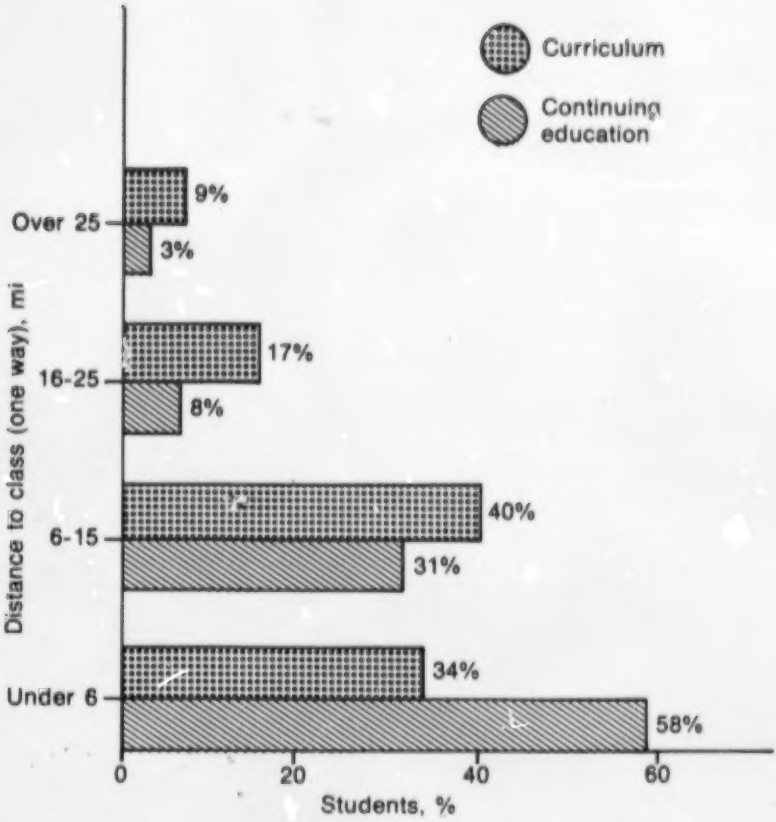

Figure 13. Distribution of curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System, 1979, by distance to class (one way)

Other Student Services

The following findings emerged when students were asked to indicate what types of services they perceived as being important to them.

- The most important services to curriculum students were parking facilities, followed by library resources and study areas.

- Continuing education students indicated parking facilities as most important, followed by provisions for transportation and library resources.

Not all services listed were available at all institutions. However, students were asked to rate the quality of services offered at their institutions. Their responses revealed that:

- The services receiving the highest rating by curriculum and continuing education students were library resources and parking facilities.
- Curriculum students indicated a need for improvement in provisions for parking, recreational facilities, and study areas; continuing education students indicated a desire for improved parking and eating facilities.

How Do Students Learn of Institutional Offerings and Who Influences Their Decisions to Attend?

When asked to indicate how they first learned about program offerings, students gave a variety of responses.

- The largest proportion of curriculum students first learned of the program in which they enrolled through institutional literature, followed by institutional personnel and other students.
- Continuing education students indicated institutional personnel, media, and unspecified "other" as their first sources of information about institutional offerings.

Students indicated that their decisions to attend a community/technical college or technical institute were influenced by several different sources. Some of the primary sources of influence were:

- Curriculum students were influenced most frequently by unspecified sources (which may represent self-influence), followed by institutional personnel, their mother, other relatives, and other students.
- Continuing education students were influenced most frequently by institutional personnel, followed by unspecified "other" and other students.

What Are the Plans for Employment and Further Education of North Carolina Community/Technical College and Technical Institute Students?

Students were asked what they planned to do upon completion of the program or course in which they were enrolled. The major plans specified by the respondents were the following.

- Nearly 40% of all curriculum students planned to work toward a baccalaureate degree. Over 85% of the continuing education respondents reported little or no interest in working toward a baccalaureate degree. In fact, 15% of those students already held such degrees.
- Nearly 3 out of 10 continuing education students planned to enroll in an associate degree or certificate program at a later date.
- Among those curriculum students surveyed and who planned to work toward a baccalaureate degree were: 75% of the 1460 college-transfer students, 67% of the 297 general education students, 41% of the 7074 technical students, 25% of the 465 special credit students, and 18% of the 2489 vocational students.
- Nearly 3 out of 10 vocational and technical students were undecided about pursuing a baccalaureate degree.
- Seven out of 10 curriculum students planned to work in North Carolina upon completion of their educational program.

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